

Discourse on Gender /
Gendered Discourse in the
Middle East

Edited by
Boaz Shoshan

Chapter 7

No Home at Home: Women's Fiction vs. Zionist Practice

Yaffah Berlovitz

George Mosse and Benedict Anderson both second this view that nationalism favours a distinctly homosocial form of male bonding. Mosse argues that "nationalism had a special affinity for male society and together with the concept of respectability legitimized the dominance of men over women." For Anderson this recognition is deeply implicit: "The nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately, it is this fraternity that makes it possible, over the past two centuries, for so many millions of people, not so much to kill as willingly die for such limited imaginings."¹

The Zionist project of ingathering the Jewish Diaspora after two thousand years of exile, and the establishment of a "national home" in the Land of Israel, has from the start taken the form of male enterprise. Truly, Zionism was in essence a revolutionary concept, an offspring to Enlightenment and progressive movements in nineteenth-century Europe. It sought to undermine discriminatory traditions and set the Jewish people on a path to a new and enlightened Jewish nationalism in the context of which nation and land are united.²

With regard to the issue of woman, however, there was obsessive entrenchment, and clinging to the old traditions was firm. Zionism and, later, Zionist Socialism, its open-mindedness and progressive vision notwithstanding, preferred to keep the status of women unchanged, thus removing women from the center of Zionist activity. Zionist women were relegated to the "women's sphere," where they could play only the marginal role of "helpmeets," not of equal partners with valid opinions. In fact, during the period of the first wave of Zionist immigration (*aliyah*), for example, the woman was attacked for her boorishness, for not supporting the national enterprise and, what's more, was accused of putting a spanner in the works. Woman supposedly lacked the national, historical, and ideological education needed in order to struggle for national liberation. Given this lack, and since she opposed every act of immigration and settlement proposed by her husband ("the Lover of Zion"), she could bring damage and cause failure only. If the wife followed her

husband, she did so with obvious reluctance and if the difficult conditions worsened, she seduced him into abandoning everything and quitting.³ Also in the second and third waves of immigration (the Zionist-Socialist), in which idealistic and educated young women, among them students, participated, workers organizations refused to grant their female members equal opportunity. They declined to let women take part in agricultural work, which they considered to be man's work. They insisted that, both in the socialist settlements known as *kibbutzim* and in the towns, women must be assigned only women's tasks: cooking, cleaning, etc.⁴

Now, it should be noted that this consigning of women to the social margins in the Land of Israel did not pass without reaction. In contradistinction to the silence of the educated woman in the Jewish communities in the Diaspora, of whose voice there is little trace, either literary or documentary,⁵ in the Land of Israel woman diverged from her reticence, insecurity, or self-denial and dared to come out and "tell" herself in every way. Alongside the authoritative, central masculine narrative, an alternative, marginal narrative—a feminine Zionist—was taking shape.

Three types of story may be discerned in this feminine narrative. The first may be described as a collectivist story, analogous to the male Zionist narrative. Examples are Rivka Alper's *Settlers on the Mountain* (1944), Ruhama Hazanov's *Fences* (1950), and Yehudit Hendel's *Street of Steps* (1955). The second type is the personal-national story of the woman as settler, pioneer, laborer, and fighter. This story complements the men's monolithic narrative, which neglects to portray women in these roles and relegates them to their traditional role as romantic objects or the ideal of motherhood and family. Here we find books such as Emma Talmi-Levin's *In the Tent Season* (1949), Anda Amir's *One* (1952), and *Between Calendars* (1981) by Netiva Ben Yehuda. The third type of story is the feminine-critical story, wherein the writing woman comes out in protest against the exclusively male, practical Zionism, against male monopoly in providing leadership, planning settlements, devising military policy, and training security services. The disappointment with the exclusion of Zionist woman from all these, the pain for her lack of any significant involvement in national activities—are echoed in this type of story.

It is with this last type, the feminine-critical, that my discussion here is concerned. This story emerges already at the very beginning of Zionist settlement in Palestine, seeping through the decades from prestatehood to statehood, from the time of a fragile Jewish national entity to its growing into a significant political power in the Middle East. It is not a dominant story, nor is it consistent, but the gathering of its scattered voices results in a unique feminine stance that is crystallizing not only into a national identity of its own, but also takes the form of a unique narrative. Due to the existence of a large amount of textual material, I will present the feminine-critical story through two representative types that developed in the context of the State of Israel. The first may be titled "no home at home"; the second revolves around the figure of the Arab lover and its literary employment as an "instrument" of subversion against Israeli man.

“NO HOME AT HOME”

The house/home⁶ that appears in prestatehood women's narrative is problematic, both factually and metaphorically. Due to her exclusion from the main Zionist enterprise, the Jewish woman increasingly felt herself estranged and alienated, the more so since the enterprise was largely referred to as the establishing of a “national home.” Thus, in Nehama Pukhachewsky's (1869-1934) stories about the first women settlers, alienation is palpable in the heroines' private homes, in the contemptuous attitude of the husbands and brothers. It also exists in the council house of the settlement, where the woman is denied suffrage rights, is prevented from taking part in meetings and decision-making. As a result of the contempt directed at her, both in her private home and in the larger social sphere, the woman settler develops a melancholic national identity.

For Pukhachewsky, however, melancholy also serves as a poetic weapon for undermining the “national home” as the fruit of male endeavor. She describes this “home,” despite its flourish, as a suffocating place, a site of confinement, in which the heroines meet their end in disease, derangement, and virtual death. That is, for Pukhachewsky, the national revival is not a feminine revival. Indeed, the literary critics (virtually all men) did not blast her stories without reason. As Zerubavel wrote angrily: “Where the reader had hoped to encounter much life, he meets corpses on all sides. . . . Seventeen dead from one writer and in one slim volume, God of Abraham! Would you destroy us entirely?”⁷

Much more recently, Shifra portrays the woman as unqualified to bear witness to the Israeli experience, since it is only male experience that is considered to count: “Woman, despite all the myths of equality and struggle, at the beginning of settlement in the Land of Israel, as well as in the wars that beset us, has not been equal and active. To call a spade a spade, she does not kill and is not killed in battle. Truth is, she is like Abraham, leading his son to the sacrificial altar, but is never like Isaac, the sacrificial offering. Therefore, she is sevenfold to be blamed for reality and disqualified from ‘bearing witness’—since one of the essential and hurtful pangs of our lives lies beyond the bounds of her experience.”⁸

Amalia Kahana-Carmon, who emphasizes that the Israeli woman writer is destined from the start to be secondary, raises an additional reason for woman's disqualification. Not only does she not participate in the quintessential male experience of providing defense and security, she also experiences the world always in a sort of “sideline experience.” Why, then, is “the real action in what he [not she] experiences?” asks Kahana-Carmon. Her answer is that the Israeli writer has transferred, in a way most natural to him, the patterns of the traditional synagogue to the secular cultural “synagogue,” conceiving of himself, metaphorically speaking, as the servant of the community in front of the Holy Ark. That is, everything he reports as an individual speaks for the entire community. His contemplation and soul-search are the same as those of the people, the challenges and duties he copes with are those of the public. This status stands in marked difference to that of the woman who, whatever she writes, will be classified and received as “an esoteric experience,” as “a letter from home.”⁹

Thus, it is not surprising to learn that Shifra is pained while listening to Haim Guri, the poet (and a soldier in the 1948 War of Independence), lecturing to her students. For he “simply told his life story, which was the annals of the State of Israel.” And how would her personal narrative be received? “What do I tell them when I stand before them, what individual experiences of mine can I tell them?”¹⁰

In light of these critical words, a question is posed: Why did Israeli women writers keep silent all these years? Why was it not until the 1980s that they, natives of the country, who had begun publishing their work already in the 1950s, raised their voices in protest against the exclusive centrality of male testimony, claiming equal recognition for their story as representatives of the “collective I”? The answer is that certain political conditions should have developed for women writers and artists to come out with their message.¹¹ Feminist views that began to be expressed in the 1970s, the founding of feminist organizations and the inclusion, by members of Knesset (Parliament) Shulamit Aloni and Marcia Freedman, of the idea of women’s equality in the national agenda¹²—were not sufficient. It was disillusion with Israeli omnipotence after the bungling of the Yom Kippur War; the overturning of the national self-image from that of defenders to aggressors (in the Lebanon war of 1982 and the *intifada* in the Occupied Territories of the late 1980s); the mounting disappointment, criticism, and protest movements, that provided the right context. Women’s voices now started to be heard in organizations such as “Women in Black,” “There’s a Limit,” and “Stop the Occupation!”

Starting in the 1970s, disillusionment also emerged in literature. Male writers expressed it in works marked by amazement and confusion, in books that were often labeled defeatist and which posed questions such as “Where did we go wrong?” “How did all this happen?” In these books, male figures were characterized by neurotic dashing along the roads and highways, by detachment, and by emotional impotence in setting up homes and families. Shabtai’s *Past Continuous* (1977) and *Past Perfect* (1984), Yehoshua’s *A Late Divorce* (1982) and *Molcho* (1987), and Amos Oz’s *Black Box* (1987), *Knowing a Woman* (1989), and *The Third Condition* (1991) all exemplify this tendency.

Also women’s fiction writing raised its flag within this wave of remorse and soul-searching. But unlike male writers, whose sense of shock hounded them to seek explanations in history, childhood, and sheer madness, and look for solutions by going abroad and even committing suicide, women writers pointed an accusing finger at the Israeli male establishment. They condemned the absolute male control over the community’s (*Yishuv*) national identity, they fumed against male distorted values, and they asserted male’s moral and ideological responsibility for the deterioration. In other words, century’s end, like century’s beginning, set the feminist stance against male Zionist practice, as an inseparable part of the renewed struggle for recognition of women’s status, involvement, and right of voice, as equal partners and central to Israel’s existence.

In her novel *Dangling Roots* (1987), Ruth Almog relates the history of a family, starting with great grandfather Elhanan Yosef Levdovi, an idealist who came to Palestine with the first wave of immigration, and ending with David Gutman, a

senior executive of the Jewish Agency. David had been a student in Liverpool in the 1940s, where he met and married Ruhama, a beautiful musician who owned a farm on Mt. Carmel. The couple was expected to have their home and raise their family on the farm, but David abandons the Zionist imperatives of "returning to the soil" and conducting a productive life. He shakes off all family responsibilities, leaves his wife and little daughter Mira, whom he would visit only when his travels allow it. He devotes himself entirely to his Zionist activity. His dedication to his mission causes everything around him to crumble: his depressed wife falls prey to attacks of madness and suicide attempts; Mira leaves the country, and the neglected farm becomes a "jungle" of thorns and weeds. Almog titled the novel *Dangling Roots* since Mira's self-image, onto which she hangs for survival, is the soothing picture of ficus trees with roots that "sway in space like empty, black bellows." In other words, to survive Mira must develop "air roots" in order to leave her four-generation roots in the country and the farm and return to the Diaspora, where she establishes relationship with Jack Barliyavski, a veterinarian, homeless like herself. The woman who was supposed to represent the realization of the Zionist dream, fruit of a Land-of-Israel childhood in nature's bosom, and product of a progressive education in the best Jewish Palestinian institutions, turns out in her own eyes to be a rotten, shriveled fruit. She is the victim of a father who, like the whole male Zionist enterprise that he nurtures and promotes, is erring and misleading. The novel, which presents a case of a woman's "I Accuse," gains power especially in its second part, which consists of a series of letters dated from the early 1970s. Mira, who is then going through another critical phase in her life, is taking her world to task through compulsive confessional letters she sends to her father. Each letter opens with "Dear Daddy," but immediately flings all her accusations—on the personal, family level and on the national, political level—at the father. "Listen, Dad . . . enough already. We're strong. We won all the wars. We conquered territories. We expelled. We killed. We destroyed villages. Enough!" And: "Do you know what a desperate person does? He does desperate deeds, Daddy. The villages you wiped off the face of the earth . . . the refugees, columns of refugees, some of them had lost all human resemblance. . . . There are too many satisfied and pampered people . . . watching starved people on television, people running from their collapsing houses while the napalm [bomb] pursues them." And also: "I think you also understand, somewhere, that the moment our war of defense turned into a war of conquest, we went into a spin, we lost clarity of mind."¹³ Indeed, using the first person plural ("we won," "we conquered," "we destroyed"), Mira Gutman feels to be herself party to the sinful acts. Being her father's victim and victim of the state, all she can do now to retain her equilibrium is to try to do penance, to put the world to rights and, with this, to transform the Zionist enterprise that became a conquering entity. Endangering herself and her friends, she becomes actively involved in European radical, left-wing organizations and fights to arouse world public opinion against the crimes of oppressive and terrorist regimes. Still, Mira finds no remedy for her personal life or for her home and country. The man in whom she had hoped to find a father figure continues to betray her, as did her own father—she uses the

word "betrayer" repeatedly in reference to her father. The Zionist State, which is her father's product and a betrayer like him, cannot be her place as long as it pursues the politics of conquest. When her father comes to her and tells her: "I have come to take you home," she asks: "Where is that?"¹⁴

A house that is not a home is described also in Shifra's *The Sand Street* (1994). Here the writer continues the tradition of protest, and finds it difficult to live in a male-controlled society. The story "The Landlord" in Shifra's collection portrays the relationship between a young woman and her husband, formerly a Mossad (the Israeli intelligence agency) man.¹⁵ Although the man sails a pleasure boat, he actually continues his spying and intelligence operations: "My husband is a man without a home, he spends his days on jet flights . . . always turns up as if by magic, tests me and I fail, I spill my drink on my dress, I lose my sandals, like a toy the spring of which has betrayed it."¹⁶ Indeed, the couple's marital life, including their wedding day, is like a seek-and-hide game: the husband appears, disappears and comes late, while the wife spends months waiting at the window side, despite his having forbidden it out of "concern" for her ("One of these days you'll fall out, Heaven forbid!"). The point is that here the toylike woman is not only "framed" onto the window,¹⁷ but is also under a house arrest. She has been forced to forfeit her freedom to live her life as she pleases just for the fear that her husband might turn up to spend a few hours with her and not find her. Home has become not only a prison but also a brothel. In her fantasies the woman compares herself to a prostitute named Helka, a favorite of the captain of her husband's boat. The neglect, lack of consideration, and false concern the ex-Mossad man displays towards his wife and everything she stands for, present a metaphorical dialectic similar to Almog's. It shows that the man's domineering devotion to the "house" (namely, the security of the state) in fact entails the destruction of home. Like all wives, the young woman wants to have a family, but going after her wandering husband she cannot achieve it, the home is always a hotel, a rented apartment, or a pleasure boat in a harbor. The destruction is also of the house, in the sense of place, environment, and nature. It is worth noting here that the perception of the house in this last sense is for Shifra problematic, since her idea of a "true" place is of a dusty sand road, a free and open road, the Land of Israel before man conquered and paved it. The contemporary Israel (of "here and now") is no longer a place, neither has it roots, and the narrator can relate to it only via the illusory presence of house/home. Thus, in "The Landlord" and "Home," she searches for an old friend at an address that only leads her astray. No wonder that the building where she was supposed to find him looks to her more like a lunatic asylum than a dwelling.

The *unheimlich* (to use a Freudian term) feeling of "no home at home" dominates other works written by women. In Orly Castel-Bloom's books it is even divorced from the desire to belong or be involved. *Where Am I?* (1990) does not indicate a question only, but also an affirmative statement, for the woman's loss of orientation in the Israeli reality is taken for granted. Israel is no longer the house/home identified with qualities such as "family" or "nationhood," but a disjointed and nightmarish locality the only activity wherein is survival. In such a locality,

Castel-Bloom's heroine manages to persevere only in the roles of a whore, a murderess, or a lunatic.¹⁸ In her changing persona she rushes from place to place, lost, hurting, and being hurt. Throughout the whole plot one is unable to decide whether Israeli loss of stability is what governs the heroine, or the other way around.

Be that as it may, in all this dashing about, the heroine, this time in her role as a whore, is given a chance to save the political situation. A man from the intelligence services tells her, "If only one Israeli woman would agree to give that cactus [Jordan's King Hussein] a decent 'blow job' the whole Arab-Israeli controversy would then be solved." And Colonel Saul, the reserve officer, does not merely suggest, but imposes on her the task of entertaining the prime minister on his visit to the border town of Kiryat Shmoneh in northern Israel. The heroine, who after giving it some thought, refuses to cooperate and prefers to read *Anna Karenina*, is quickly thrown out of the official's car, all the passing motorists fleeing from her "as if from a dangerous monster."¹⁹ On another, violent occasion, she does, after all, "contribute" to Israeli public affairs when, in the course of a terrorist attack on a bus, she grabs the steering wheel. The driver for some reason chooses to relate a story about the convoys to Jerusalem in the 1948 war, then forsakes the passengers and turns himself over to the enemy; however, the "tramp" (as the terrorist, pointing a gun to her head, calls the heroine) halts the bus at the mouth of the abyss. Castel-Bloom's cynical pat on the heroine's shoulder only reinforces the absurdity of contemporary Israel under the male leadership of the prime minister and minister of police, the Israeli Defense Forces, down to the last of the Egged (the national bus company) drivers.²⁰

Absurdity is also the mark of Castel-Bloom's *Dolly City* (1992), a metaphoric name for the city of Tel Aviv. This time the heroine is a murderess named Dolly who, disguised as a caring medical doctor, proclaims that her mission is performing euthanasia on the inhabitants of her city for humanistic grounds: to deliver them from the existential purgatory that Tel Aviv is. This also applies to Dolly's only son whom, supposedly out of anxiety and concern for his health, she constantly (mis) treats with injections and operations. She also covers him with Zionist tattoos: "I took a knife and began to cut here and there. From memory I drew the biblical map of the Land of Israel. . . . I drew Lake Tiberias, and the Jordan River spilling into the Dead Sea . . . tiny drops of blood started to gather in the beds of the rivers incised to the length and breadth of the land . . . my baby wailed in pain, but I persisted. . . . I looked at the lacerated back: here was the map of The Land of Israel, there was no mistaking it." There is no doubt that the act of engraving the biblical map on the back of a male child is an essential act in preparing Israeli boys for their self-realization right at the center of the national culture that is exclusively theirs. After all, the boy himself is the map; he shapes the country, its history, and its borders. In the end, his mother is not disappointed in him. Even though, in her old age, he confines her to a lunatic asylum, she watches his career with pride: his studies in the "school for brutal seamanship," his work in the "river police," his adventures as a hijacker in the course of which he fails in his attempt to hijack a plane to Luxembourg and, wounded, hides in the Gobi Desert while helicopters

are circling overhead. Dolly, however, stays calm, knowing that, after all she had done to him—"a bullet or a knife in the back—this is nothing he can't cope with."²¹

Unlike Almog's or Shifra's, Castel-Bloom's postmodernist writing is derisively critical. In their funny/shocking language, her heroines appear to confirm the Israeli norms of male chauvinism and the incidentality of women; but in their madness or eccentricity they always exclude themselves from these norms, undermine and dismantle them. So with Dolly, who describes the sociopolitical structure of her city: "Dolly City, a bottomless city, without past, without infrastructure . . . the regime in Dolly City is democratic, however ridiculous that may sound. . . . There are two big parties: Bureaucracy and Procedure. . . . Bureaucracy has soldiers, the 'no-goodniks' . . . a strong smell of male urine. . . . Procedure is an entirely different genre. . . . Every one of the guys has swum across Lake Tiberias scores of times. They all love to walk in Jerusalem, most of them jog around the Old City every evening. . . . They know all the hot Hebrew songs. . . . Most of the inhabitants of Dolly City belong to 'those,' as in the line, 'At the time there were those, too.' . . . 'Those' are the offspring of the hewers of wood . . . who suffered from hyperactivity and hewed down all the trees around their houses, just to have something on which to vent their aggression." And where is Dolly in all this? "Luckily, I managed to preserve myself and not fall into the trap of any group, I learned to keep a low profile, I learned that the whole trick is to pretend you're asleep, and act subversively."²²

An attempt at undermining and dismantling the male establishment can be discerned also in Shulamit Lapid's *Local Paper* (1989), the first in her series of detective books. Here the protagonist is Liza Bedihi, an old maid and a Be'er Sheva journalist, whose entire world consists of round-the-clock reports of local affairs in her town. The plot revolves around her clumsy, miserable exposure to competition with males in local key positions. These are rascals, charlatans, or simply fools. Pinhas Hornshtick, a judge in the district court, turns out to be a wanted murderer; what's more, his whole life is nothing but a series of crimes of various degrees committed to advance his own interests. The treasurer and secretary of "Kibbutz Sdeh Oznia" swindle half a million dollars to play in the "gray market" and get benefits for themselves. The idiot is the Nature Preservation guide, who is assumed to get his sightseers interested in the country, except that he is a senseless chatterer whose flowery talk nobody understands. The evil Israeli is the literary critic whose sole interest is in nullifying Israeli writers and their writing, enhancing his own role in shaping the country's literary canon. The crude Israeli is the journalist who is on the editorial board of the local newspaper. The loud and foolish Israeli is the Be'er Sheva police detective who would not be able to unravel the mysteries he is assigned to, were it not for Liza Bedihi ("loony," as he calls her). Bedihi's triumph in Lapid's allegory on the Israeli gender scene is a sad joke about the "happy end" cliché that every respectable tale assumes. "The versions change every now and then . . . but at the end of every story, Little Red Riding Hood overcomes the wolf and handcuffs him."²³ In Lapid's attempt at "corrective discrimination" a reporter, who is ridiculed both as a woman and a journalist, becomes the heroine

of the day and part of the local pathetic mythology.

THE ROMANTIC PLOT: JEWISH WOMAN/ARAB MAN

Nonmarital mixed relationships in the context of the European reality have always been depicted by Jewish writers as taking place between a Jewish man and a Gentile woman, a type of relationships one critic has termed "the masculine model." Versions of this model can be found in the writing of Berdyczewski (*Two Camps*), Bialik (*Behind the Fence*), Agnon (*The Lady and the Peddler*), and others. In the context of Israeli social reality, gender relationship changes, and the feminine model in literature now becomes dominant: the relationship is between the Jewish (Israeli) woman and the Gentile (Arab) man. We find it, for example, in Amos Oz's *My Michael*, A. B. Yehoshua's *The Lover*, and Sammy Michael's *Refuge*.²⁴ What caused this change of model? Though given in different versions, the answer is the Israeli man's fear of the Arab being his competitor for the Israeli woman, it being an extension of the fear of competition for national existence. According to Komem, "the significance of the feminine model is that the Arabs did not succeed in defeating us on the battlefield, but could defeat us . . . with the instinct for life, with biology."²⁵

Ben Ezer, another critic, writes on this topic: "The expression of existential distress by writers like Amos Oz, A. B. Yehoshua and others since the 1960s, derives from turning the Arab into a nightmare, the shadowy aspect, the dark side of life onto which we project our fear, terror, and the recoiling that is in our souls. . . . Not only does the Arab frighten us, he bothers us and doesn't let us Israelis live as we would like to, detached from constant confrontation, from the [political] conflict and the wars that derive from it." Ben Ezer points out that the struggle between the Jewish Assaf and the Arab Isam over the Jewish woman in Jacob Buchan's *The Sleepwalkers* and, likewise, between Daniel and Abdallah in Benjamin Tammuz's *The Orchard*, is actually the struggle between Jews and Arabs over the country, the landscape, the motherland.²⁶

In a similar vein Shifra writes about Michael and Hannah's failing relationship in Amos Oz's *My Michael*. Disappointed and crazy, Hannah escapes to her delusions and dreams, waiting in both fear and pleasure for the twin Arab guys who had been her childhood neighbors in Jerusalem. According to Shifra, "[Hannah's] failure and insanity are not personal. . . . They are the failure of Jewish masculinity. . . . Hannah's desire for being dominated, for pleasure and death at the hands of the Arab twins is an extension of our collective fears and our own suicidal wish as a nation."²⁷ In other words, it is not the heroine Hannah, who longs for the Arab twins, but Oz, the writer, who regards himself as responsible for the nation. In his anxiety and impotence in the face of the Arab threat, he is the one who drives the nation to madness, to longing for "domination, pleasure and death."

For Israeli female writers, as for male, the feminine model (Jewish woman/Arab man) is the common one.²⁸ We find it already in Hemdah Ben Yehuda's "The Kaddish" (1903), a story about a Jerusalem woman who cannot bear a male child

to her husband. When everyone derides her for being merely a “mother of daughters,” she secretly contacts an Arab sorcerer and, to everyone’s surprise, including her own husband’s, succeeds in giving birth to a son. Already in this early story one can discern signs of the subversive/erotic conspiracy against the Jewish man.²⁹ Conspiracy, as we will see below, develops over the years to a representation of the Arab as lover. Except that the story of the lover has its other intention: it also serves as a tool in the protest against male Zionist practice.

Perusal of women’s literature, then, reveals time and time again an absolute contrast to male writers’ treatment of the Arab. Not only the carving of the Arab hero, but also the representation of the relationship between the Jewish woman and the Arab man and the way it develops are different. Furthermore, in contrast to the common identification of the woman with the nation—after all, the Hebrew words *em/umah* (mother/nation) share the same root³⁰—the Israeli heroine in women’s literature feels unthreatened by the Arab and has no anxiety about developing a romantic relationship with him. Furthermore, this relationship has a refined and especially sensitive quality to it. For the purpose of my analysis here I have chosen to concentrate on four representative novels, two of which were written in the 1960s and two in the 1990s. These are Batia Kahana’s *The Arrows Are beyond Thee*, Hemda Alon’s *No Trespassing*, Smadar Hartzfeld’s *Inta Umri*, and Joceline Carmi-Amir’s *Threads of Sand*.³¹ Incidentally, critical response, literary as well as public, to these works was slight (in the sixties as well as in the nineties) despite their deviant stance and harsh protest. Perhaps this has to do with the general lack of attention to women’s political writing. Or perhaps these works in particular were not sufficiently valued by the critical establishment.

Be that as it may, my intention is not to deal with each novel separately, but to examine the four on a comparative basis. The main themes to be treated are the encounter between the Jewess and the Arab; the character of the lover; the romantic relationship; and finally, what I term “the double absence.”

Encounter between the Jewess and the Arab

The four novels have the same point of departure: a chance meeting between a young Jewish woman and an Arab man, at which the former displays indifference or even aversion toward her counterpart. However, this initial reaction is misleading because, whether the woman is aware of the man’s ethnic identity or not, and even though she at first shakes him off, she then somehow finds him exciting. In *The Arrows Are beyond Thee*, Gina Shiloni, a Vienna-born Jewish young woman, who had immigrated to Palestine and married a Tel Aviv merchant at the end of the 1930s, meets the Jaffa Arab Ibrahim Kubdaji selling stockings in a crowded little shop. She drops a pair and Ibrahim hurries to pick them up and hand them to her. This is how she describes him upon their first meeting: “Beautiful face . . . slightly hooked nose. . . . In Europe we were used to seeing such faces on packs of Turkish cigarettes, or in advertisements on cinema screens. . . . But the eyes! When I looked into them it was as if I drowned for a moment in his gaze. . . . He simply confused me.” Embarrassed, Gina, accompanied by her girlfriend, quickly leaves the shop.

The friend asks: "What do you think of the handsome Arab?" And Gina, surprised, answers: "Arab? Why Arab?"³²

In *No Trespassing*, Roni, a history student at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem in the early 1950s, does not recognize 'Ali Qadri as an Arab when she meets him at a student party. "I don't know when I first noticed the strange fellow with the dark gaze, sitting silent and onto himself against the wall. . . . Was it his look that made me lift my feet, that caused the rounded and lengthened movement of my thighs? Was it by chance or out of intention that I collapsed . . . near him? May be it only was the first vacant place I found . . . when the dance was over?"³³

In *Threads of Sand*, which takes place in the early 1990s, Jasmin, a divorcée who works in a public relations agency, goes with two girlfriends for a weekend in Nueba at Sinai. She wonders what her friends find enjoyable in the Egyptian men they expect to meet in the hotel: "Egyptians? Arabs? How could they . . . Christians don't turn me on, either, but Arabs? How weird! Throughout my thirty-eight years I have been telling myself and those around me that I'm not a racist and only now do I see how little we know ourselves."³⁴

Willy-nilly, fortune dictates its mysterious, opportune circumstances. The "blind dates" or chance meetings result in the Arab passionately courting the Jewish woman (*The Arrows Are beyond Thee*), or the liberated, modern young woman (*Inta Umri*) desiring the Palestinian coffee-machine operator—who complimented her on her "cappuccino-colored" eyes—and inviting him to join her for a ride in her car. Here it should be noted that the novels in which the Jewish woman is drawn into an affair with her partner, be he an Arab in the time of the British mandate on Palestine, an Israeli Arab, a Palestinian, or an Egyptian, reach hyperrealistic intensity. Even though some of the writers try to tone down the dramatization, it is clearly there.

The Character of the Lover

The Arab lover, as portrayed by the writers of the four novels, is not always an ideal human being. Thus Gina Shiloni discovers that Kubdaji is a crude and arrogant man, particularly towards incompetent people; he could be cruel to a boy asking for alms in the market. There is no doubt, however, that the Arab is an ideal lover. Therefore, if the Jewish woman finds him interesting, she is unperturbed by the political circumstances. The Arab lover succeeds in drawing her away from the immediate reality, sweeping her into the transcendental domain of love. Incidentally, love is accompanied by abundant beauty, be it the spiritual beauty of sensitivity and understanding (*No Trespassing*), scenic beauty (*Inta Umri*), or the material beauty of a high standard of living: grand hotels, yachts, love lockets (*The Arrows Are beyond Thee*; *Threads of Sand*). In the temporarily new reality, the Arab lover is not a provincial villager or a wild Bedouin, but a cosmopolitan "man of the world," educated, multilingual, of European manners, exuding personal charm. Thus, the businessman Kubdaji conducts himself between his Jaffa villa and Baalbek in Lebanon. Likewise, 'Ali Qadri is a doctoral student of Arabic folklore, whose wealthy Nazareth family (his uncle is a member of Knesset) enabled him to acquire

education at prestigious English colleges. Nadir, the Egyptian, a racecar driver and owner of a hotel in Nueba, charms all his listeners with his command of French. In sum, the Arab heroes in the novels are not only superior to the common Arab, but also to the common Israeli. This is indeed how the heroines justify to themselves their romantic involvement with their Arab lovers.

Every heroine in these novels is in fact shocked to find herself involved in this sort of peculiar love affair, and examines her own perception of the Arab against that of her family members and public opinion. "My brother . . . a brigadier general . . . to him you are the enemy. . . . My father is moderate, thoughtful, objective: 'I have many Arab acquaintances' he is used to start his conversations. . . . And my mother concludes the discussion unequivocally: 'I hate them. . . . I won't let [an Arab maid] into my home.'" Still, the young Israeli woman, although product of national education and indoctrination, is searching for her own opinion. "I could have mocked myself in relief for my anxiety. . . . Did it ever occur to me? How could I keep away from 'Ali just because he's an Arab? . . . A fellow immersed in his studies and research . . . modest, well mannered, full of fascinating stories. Really, Arab, Jew or Hottentot, in this case it's not in the least important."³⁵

Nevertheless, there are doubts and suspicion about the Arab's gallant courtship and colorful love talk which, in the woman's view, contain a modicum of Oriental exaggeration. "You drive me crazy," Nadir confesses (*Threads of Sand*), and he continues: "The more I learn about you, the more I love you. You are a sunshine in my life." Jasmin, cynic as she is, doesn't hide her feelings and bursts in laughter: "Here's the Orient that is in you coming out." And she goes on mockingly to illustrate it: "Sunshine!" Yet, Nadir is not hurt; on the contrary, he tries to convince her. "Don't laugh! Not only are you sunshine, you give meaning to my life." Impatiently, realizing the cultural gap between them, Jasmin replies: "You know what? I believe you. What do I care?"³⁶

In *No Trespassing*, Roni displays a different kind of suspicion. It has to do with the prejudice about Arab "wildness." "Do you believe that the instinctive drives are always evil?" She tries to draw 'Ali into a sort of philosophical discussion on the socialization of instincts. 'Ali answers: "Evil? Actually not. Wild, like a wild horse. His sole desire is to dismount the rider." "You talk as if you are afraid of your drives," Roni continues her psychologist attempt to uncover the "authentic I" concealed in 'Ali: "I'm not afraid. On the contrary, I think it would be rather boring to live in this world if all drives were completely restrained." 'Ali disagrees. Afterwards, to herself, Roni continues to interpret him according to the stereotype she grew up with: "I thought about these things later... Why is he afraid? Is it because he comes from a violent environment, is it for his wild tradition and the unrestrained instincts engulfing him since his youth? Is it because he knows himself that he must be afraid . . . always on the guard? If so . . . where does the wildness reveal itself?"³⁷

What has been portrayed thus far belongs to the early groping and uncertainties involved in establishing relationship between the Jewish woman and the Arab man. After creating mutual trust, the image of an admirable man emerges, accompanied

by the full-of-wonder descriptions of a woman in love. "I knew . . . that I had to be . . . by myself . . . to bring a little order to the upheaval inside me . . . a basic putting the house in order to receive the new, terrible, wonderful consciousness—my love for 'Ali, my 'Ali, the Arab." And: "I adored Ali. He had everything I could wish for in a man. . . . I could have carried my head proudly and invite the whole world to see my happiness, to participate in it, to wonder at it, to envy it."³⁸

Needless to say, not only do these passionate descriptions remove prejudices against the Arab man, consciously or otherwise, they also question the positive image of the Israeli man and, above all, his relationship and behavior to women. Roni becomes aware of her love for 'Ali, the Israeli Arab, when in the annoying company of Israeli Jewish male students, who spend an entire evening, their wives sitting beside them, telling dirty, arrogant jokes about their wives. Gina Shiloni, although wife and mother, allows herself to be swept into a passionate love affair with Kubdaji, after the routine of her life with her husband—absorbed in his business and indifferent to her—has left her a bored, neurotic woman, working out her frustration in Tel Aviv cafes and window shopping. Jasmin says of her Egyptian lover: "I actually enjoy . . . his nonaggressive courtship. . . . It's a refreshing change from the average Israeli, who first tries to get you into bed and then asks what your name is."³⁹ And the narrator in *Inta Umri* disgustedly rejects the Israeli "yuppie," as well as herself, for being economically dependent on him. She confesses: "In my new job I've met various people . . . busy, decisive, carrying spring-locked flat leather suitcases full of sex and politics foreign magazines. People who frequently use the expressions . . . 'The sky's the limit,' 'Die rich,' 'To be disgustingly rich.' Contact with them has changed me, I've become a person who accepts life as a fact. I often use the word 'fact.' . . . It gives me the feeling that my feet are on . . . concrete . . . strong and indifferent."⁴⁰ The Palestinian lover is an antithesis to the cold, efficient, materialistic technocrat that is the Israeli "yuppie." The Arab is of the authentic, human species that is being wiped out, a species free of falsity, self-interest, artificiality, and so on. He is sincere and inspires trust by his outlook, his attitude, his emotions, his appearance, and his warm, hearty laugh. Furthermore, the narrator's relationship with the Palestinian Arab has endeared Israeli locality to her, revived her desire to live there. "My eyes are as happy as birds flying out of the cage. I began to think in a different, feminine, heavy and intoxicating language. . . . I was no longer ashamed to use picturesque terms. For the first time in my life I was colored in starlight. And the country, the people I had been ashamed of all my life, also sparkled with a new sheen. I no longer hated my place. I whispered to my love: Come, let us make up for what we've missed."⁴¹

The Romantic Relationship

While the idealization of the Arab as an aesthetic and universalistic hero contributes poetically to the hyperealization of the emotional connection, love in its various shapes and forms serves to intensify it. The intensification signifies, first and foremost, a conspiracy. As has been implied, the love affairs in all four novels take place in secrecy; the individuals involved know that exposure would

bring a hostile and damaging reaction on every level—the national (accusations of conspiring with an enemy), economical (dismissal from the workplace), and emotional (an end to the affair). The secret, therefore, is not only a literary device to navigate a dramatic plot dealing with a “double life,” it actually serves a desperate wish of the couple, experiencing loss even while they are still together, to extend their diminishing time together. As Roni Bar-On expresses it: “Nobody can take away these days that we stole from that rich miser called time. Nobody, only time itself, can take them from us.”⁴²

The contest with borrowed time, the conspiracy that dictates a double life, and the dead end lying ahead, all result in a situation wherein the couple try to escape, if only for a while, from the “here and now,” creating a world within a world, in which forbidden love is accepted as legitimate and absolutely normative. It is not in vain that this utopian world is called “paradise” (*No Trespassing; Threads of Sand*) or “an Oriental legend” (*The Arrows Are beyond Thee*). The compelling rule in this special territory is to cast off the strictness of the outside world, to open up to any realistic or fantastic alternative. Indeed, in the Oriental tale, where Gina finds herself (walking in Kubdaji’s splendid estate in Lebanon), she feels like an enchanted princess, and the white flowers that the Arab showers on her enhance the illusion. Jasmin’s mysterious and pleasurable kingdom stretches the length of the Nile where, on a tourist dreamboat, she celebrates with Nadir their love and anonymity. The narrator in *Inta Umri* finds her romantic haven in a deserted leper hospital in Jerusalem. Every day after work, she and ‘Umar find there an escape, and in the garden, among the trees, they invent their own “island” and its laws. So, too, Roni and ‘Ali at the Qadri family home in Ein Kerem, near Jerusalem, on a Passover, when ‘Ali’s uncle, the member of Knesset, goes to Nazareth and allows them a taste of “paradise,” where “the laws are written for love alone.” Further on: “Here we could love one another in daylight, for the first time we were able to be . . . free of annoying haste. . . . There was no need to struggle, to hurt, in order to feel one another.”⁴³

However, also in this ephemeral state of calmness and well being, love knows no respite, but continues to pursue its subjects with extreme intensity. The most trivial of events becomes gravid with a sense of destiny. In this intensity, the lovers cling to one another, learning each other, not wasting one bit of their temporary, attenuated, mutual knowledge. Roni, for example, likens her curiosity and desire to learn to an archeological excavation, removing layer after layer her prejudices about and fear of the (possibly hostile) stranger, in order to reach his inner core. “I seemed to myself like an archeologist uncovering the ruins of an ancient fortress, every stone, every ceramic vessel, every statue is a surprising discovery.” And later on: “We felt a strong thirst to know, to recognize one another. Impatiently, all at once, we wanted to compensate ourselves for all the years and distance that had separated us. Each of us wanted to penetrate into the other’s personality and be absorbed in it, as if we believed that by removing the internal partitions between us, the walls separating us from the outside would tumble down.”⁴⁴

The short-term love is terminated in varying doses, either with an open-ended

end, which leaves possibilities unresolved, or a sorrowful, expected, and irreversible separation. The most shocking end, presented in *Inta Umri*, is that of the love affair between the young woman from the bookstore and the young Palestinian from the coffee shop. The time is of the uprisings (*intifada*) of the late 1980s, and 'Umar, whose family had suffered exile and banishment, tries to extricate himself from the same destiny and establish himself in Israel. But his attempt is of no avail. The Jewish-Arab conflict puts him under constant suspicion, he is unable to continue studying at the university, the only job offers he gets are at the cleaners or as a waiter, and every so often the police harass him with arrest and torture. He wants to preserve forever—in death—his impossible love for a Jewish girl, the sole enjoyment in his entire life. "I have been afraid all my life and on the run. . . . I'm afraid of you, too, sometimes, but I don't want to run away from you. . . . I don't want, nor am I able . . . to remain like this, caressing you and afraid of you. . . . Yet I am able to die, to die together with you. It doesn't look frightening to me. It even attracts . . . excites me. It seems beautiful. You and me dying together, think what freedom it will be!"⁴⁵

The despair of the young Palestinian, who has nothing to look forward to, and certainly nothing to lose, infects the Jewish girl. Caught between love and guilt (for being part of the Israeli Occupation) she agrees to cooperate with her lover. From here on, the only idea that interests the couple and unites them is death. Their discussions increasingly assume the form of a detailed preparation (location, date, garments, instruments, etc.) for a ritualistic ceremony of suicide. Yet, throughout all these clandestine preparations, the young woman continues to oppose the destructive decision: she defines it as madness, she consumes sleeping pills to let time pass, but, in the end, she doesn't avert the decision. The couple almost carries out their suicide pact, but they are saved by a man who happens to pass by the deserted Arab village they had chosen as a site for executing their plan. Tragedy, however, is not averted. The death that should have united the couple is exchanged for life that separates them. How will 'Umar continue this sort of life? There is no way of knowing. At any rate, the young Israeli woman now begins living out her guilt feelings in a double life. On the surface she plays the role of the successful "yuppie," yet she internalizes the Palestinian's existential condition, assuming it to be her own identity. "I am becoming stolid, I am becoming indifferent, I am becoming a lady with the deep, intense despair of the refugee."⁴⁶

Neither does Roni Bar-On's love affair, although no less sorrowful, have a sort of Romeo and Juliet ending. Like 'Umar, 'Ali is also marked down by the security services, so that, from the start, his relationship with Roni turns out to have been under surveillance. At some point Roni is warned by a friend of her brigadier-general brother. An intelligence man, he seeks to spare her a police investigation, particularly when 'Ali is accused of aiding his brother Saleem, who is in prison for underground activities. These are the days of the military regime over the Arab population in Israel of the 1950s, and 'Ali is in prison awaiting trial. Roni, who has had to stop her university studies by order of the Security Services, finds it difficult to stay at home with her family who, when learning about their

“traitor” daughter, are in a state of shock. Roni goes to live temporarily in her uncle’s *kibbutz*, where she takes stock of her life and the world around her, an examination that ends inconclusively, with more questions than answers.

Jasmin, a thirty-eight year old divorcée, independent and liberated in the style of the 1990s, has no dream of formalizing her relationship with an Egyptian man. Although she had never experienced such a gallant and refined love, she knows that it has no future. The supposedly enlightened and liberal Tel Aviv society turns malicious. From the whispering behind her back she learns of the aversion her love affair inspires, not to mention her father who, while himself living with a gentile woman on the French Riviera, squarely attacks, denounces, and threatens her. Thus, like the heroine in a Greek tragedy, at the height of her happiness marching towards her death, Jasmin renounces her relationship with her Arab lover. When Nadir comes to join her, she says: “For your own sake, I wouldn’t want you to live here. You have met wonderful people, but to my regret, most Israelis aren’t like them. I wouldn’t want you to live in a place where you would be regarded as a second-class citizen. As an Arab, that’s what you would be. You would simply be an ‘Arab,’ and Arab is some concept here.”⁴⁷

Gina (*The Arrows Are beyond Thee*) is the only woman in these four novels who does not mourn her parting from Ibrahim Kubdaji. Being a married woman, she knows in advance that her relationship with him is an adventure, an intermission in her being wife and mother, a “recharging” through compliments and courtship, only to return to her routine with renewed strength. Still, Gina returns to her normal life with not only memories of love, but with the fruit of love. The son she had wanted for years to bring into the world, and had not been able to with her husband, she now carries in her womb. From here on, the conspiratorial plot undergoes an additional transformation: concealment of the lover becomes concealment of the son’s origins, an illicit love to a non-Jew. Gina’s love for Ibrahim is transformed and enhanced tenfold through her love for Tsevi, the son, whose name in the biblical Song of Songs stands for beloved man.

“The Double Absence”

According to Franz Fanon, “[n]ational consciousness, which is not nationalism, is the only thing that will give us an international dimension.”⁴⁸ The love story between a Jewish woman and an Arab man is beginning to seem like a challenge not only to the patriarchal,⁴⁹ but also the national, order. The Israeli woman, lacking a home at her own home, assumes the role of undermining Israeli male totality and appeals against the man/woman, as well as the Jew/Arab dichotomy. She provides Fanon’s “international dimension.” In spite of her repeated failure to conduct a dialogue with the hegemonic “Israeliness,” in the special space she creates there are two nations that, in spite of the hostility and the political conflict between them, open up to the possibilities of border crossing and transnational discourse.⁵⁰

Needless to say, the creation of such an alternative space severely threatens the existence of the Israeli “Self”—to use de Beauvoir’s terminology⁵¹—either on an individual level, as the Arab lover competes with the brother or father, or on the

national level, where he is perceived as a fifth column trying to sabotage woman and state. In other words, with regard to the Arab lover, the Israeli woman's rebellious act assumes the character of a contest deviating from the personal-intimate and touching on the communal-public. Her protest against insults directed at her, which she has until now kept to herself, contained within her personal-biographical story, now emerges. It arouses the Israeli society to confront the demand to put an end to the "forbidden" love and separate the couple by legal means or public pressure. The young Israeli woman of the 1960s and more so of the 1990s, conceiving of herself to be liberated and independent, knows how to do battle. Indeed, her resistance is passive, but (as we will see below) she adopts various strategies, among which verbal expression is dominant.

The woman in the four novels here discussed often uses her voice as a weapon. At times she roars and at other times she whispers, but either way she reveals whatever is in her heart, as when she expresses herself directly and uncompromisingly against her parents and family (*No Trespassing*), against the police (*Inta Umri*) or, against the entire society (*Threads of Sand*). In contradistinction, the Arab (be he Egyptian, Israeli, or Palestinian) always keeps quiet, and even if he has his own opinions, he prefers to conceal them, so that more than once the impression is that the struggle is not his, neither as a man fighting for the love of a woman, nor for his country. His silence often turns his gender identity into a sort of "free floating artifice"⁵² that moves the two poles of masculinity and femininity. Which means that, whereas his woman lover appears to him as part of the Israeli establishment (in spite of her struggle against it) and is represented as a masculine subject, the Arab appears as vanquished, as a feminine object without a voice and opinion.⁵³

It must be remembered, however, that the Arab's mute opposition is not just out of his own choice, but is the outcome of the Security Service's constant surveillance of him. When he does indirectly express his political opinion to his lover, it is always garbed in philosophical theory. For example, in answer to Roni's question as to "whether with the establishment of the State of Israel . . . evil was done to the Arab nation that was living there," Ali answers: "Do I have to be a nationalist zealot in order for you to understand me? And if I don't want to be involved in something that is of no critical importance to me, and if I have decided to forcefully free myself of all those invalid emotions, am I not permitted to do so?" When 'Ali agrees to, he defines nationalism as "the basic aspiration of each of its individuals for life and happiness."⁵⁴

This "life and happiness" sounds like a slogan taken out of the lexicon used by each of the heroines inhabiting the novels. In the name of this slogan she struggles against Israeli political dogmatism, the whole concern of which, she claims, is to work for the public good by ignoring the good of its individuals and their personal own fulfillment. This slogan makes her feel injured as in a state that has proclaimed freedom and equality, yet intervenes in and causes harm to its citizens' affairs. Furthermore, bearing the torch of "life and happiness" allows the woman to portray Israeli society as a whole—both the men who dictate and the women who carry

out the orders—as a reactionary/conservative society, insulated from universal liberal thought. This is a society where young women like the heroines cannot live, they must either fight it or leave.

There is no doubt that the harshest pronouncement on the subject can be found in Smadar Hartzfeld's *Inta Umri*. The heroine there attacks Israel's occupational policy since the very first wave of Zionist immigration, not just since the Six Day War in 1967. According to Hartzfeld's critical-historical interpretation, the Zionist movement is a colonialist movement intended from the outset to conquer and rule.

This nation . . . pounces suddenly. At first only a few, here and there. . . . Finally the swarms come . . . they are not satisfied with the fields, but invade the houses . . . they cover the roads and water holes. . . . The sky becomes black and war is ignited. The poor old king [the somnolent Orient] went out to battle. He struggled for his villages and fields . . . for velvet nights sprinkled with moon pearls . . . for the serenity of the nights . . . for the soft silence . . . periodically rent by a braying donkey . . . but we could not and did not want to join his sleep. . . . We did not honor the King and did not fear to fight him. Yes, we fought the East and we are still fighting it.⁵⁵

Needless to say, in Hartzfeld's view this militant history gave birth to the kind of education the heroine was raised on, and a militant one it was. Though, she never agreed with it: "I always knew that evil men would come from there [the Arab villages]. . . . They would have *kaffiyas* [Arab headgear] on their heads. . . . All around me people would be shouting and hiding, they would escape in boats, but I wouldn't shout or hide. . . . I would go eastward. . . . I would cross over and look at all the evil men. I always knew that somewhere along the hedge was my Arab, the one, who wouldn't let me die, who would endanger his life for me."⁵⁶ Therefore, it is not without any reason that this young woman feels alienated from her family, friends, her entire milieu. For her, Israel is both Diaspora and oppression, and when she discovers welts on her beloved 'Umar's back (the results of interrogation and torture) she not only considers herself guilty ("What have we done to you, 'Umar? Is it our soldiers, the police?") but invokes *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and *Cry Beloved Country* against the barbarism that is revealed in this horror tale. She sees herself and 'Umar as Hansel and Gretel in the Brothers Grimm tales, lost in the Israeli "Black Forest," the only escape from which is death.⁵⁷

Roni Bar On's verbal presentation is also aggressive and, given the background of the early 1960s, when the Arab question in Israel was not open to public discussion and there was public consensus on the government's attitude toward the Israeli Arabs, her extremely bitter words are certainly bold. Roni blames the entire Israeli male establishment for putting, in the name of the community, her individual rights under threat. Thus, she accuses the Intelligence Services man whose job is to warn her: "We know you. . . . We know the clean methods of your vile work. . . . Do you think everyone is as depraved as you are? By what right do you ask me to run to you and inform on him. . . . State security! What other grandiose words do you have?" She fumes at her friend, a law student, who tries to induce her not to contact Ali for legal reasons: "So what do you recommend? Nuremberg Laws? Or maybe,

'cast all new-born sons into the river?' Do you want us to treat our minority the way anti-Semites in every generation have treated the Jewish minority in their countries? Do you think we have a moral right to do so?" She explodes at her brother, the army officer, in her eyes "an automaton without feelings or opinions," who is only concerned with his reputation. "What's actually bothering you. . . . Suddenly you're worried about me, my soul, or is it about yourself, the shame I've brought upon you. . . . How did you put it? 'Running around with Arabs?'"⁵⁸ The most severe accusation she directs is at the *kibbutz*, an organization presumably based on a revolutionary, socialist ideal of a just society, and at her uncle there, the one who for her is the epitome of the *kibbutz* society ("Jacob is the conscience of the *kibbutz*"). Throughout her struggle, Roni believes that in case the rope tightens around her neck the *kibbutz* would morally support her. "After all . . . what is the *kibbutz*, if not a different, progressive society, free of prejudice, established on new foundations, novel laws? This is what I need, after all, new laws. A just regime that has a place for Ali and myself, too"). But when in actual distress, when she is harassed and turns to the *kibbutz* for help, Jacob, her uncle, a man of the progressive Left, shakes off all responsibility. "It isn't so simple," he rejects her outright, and she is shocked, dumbstruck, and unable to react. "I tried to cry out, I wanted to protest, to rebuke him. But I said nothing. . . . I sat in silence. I didn't want to hear any more, because I don't want to understand and I'm not prepared to come to terms with [reality]." Like the entire male national establishment, including the socialist establishment, Jacob has failed her.⁵⁹

Unlike the other heroines, Jasmin is not socially committed, therefore her fight is not as bitter as theirs. She is a practical and intelligent young woman, whose complex life history (her mother died young, her father sent her to a convent in France in order for her to receive suitable education, and lived distantly from her all her life) has taught her to enjoy life. Her love for Nadir ("This is the first time such a thing has happened to me. I'm stunned!") is something different. Therefore, Jasmin's reaction is not so much in the form of aggression as rebellion. She revolts mainly against the racist remarks flung at her by her friends. "I have trouble with the sentence 'You're having an affair with an Arab'; 'It's true he's really cute. I never suspected he was an Arab'; 'Are you crazy? My parents would shoot me. I can't even bring a Yemenite home, an Arab?'"⁶⁰ One might say that when she is waiting at the airport for Nadir, she expresses her reaction against "Zionism/racism." "I felt similarly to what I had felt when I first arrived in the country, as I stood in a crowd singing the national anthem."⁶¹ In other words, Jasmin's rebuke to her "happy-go-lucky," so-called right-thinking, peace-loving Tel Aviv friends is expressed in the analogy she makes between the Zionist renaissance and her own rebirth as a woman in love. Her discovery of love through the Egyptian man is, in her eyes, the very realization of contemporary Zionism. It is the "our hope has not vanished" (as in the Israeli national anthem) of a liberal and patriotic woman.

In *The Arrows Are beyond Thee*, as already pointed out, the Arab, though unaware, succeeds where the Jew fails, that is, to give Gina a son. Why did the

author choose to taunt the husband and injure his male pride so badly? It seems that her protest is not so much against the Israeli as man, but against his firm assumption that one must hate the stranger just for being a stranger. In the frame story, Tsevi, Gina's son, who is a soldier at the time of Arab infiltration into Israel prior to the Sinai War of 1956, furiously opposes his hosts, who support mixed marriages: "All Gentiles . . . living among us . . . are evil, and I hate them. But a thousand times worse are those who were born to mixed marriages. May their names and memory be erased."⁶² Tsevi then spends the night in the renovated attic, where he finds his mother's diary (Gina died when he was a boy). There she tells about her love affair with Kubdaji and the birth of their son. Tsevi, stunned to find out he is the son of an Arab, now reexamines his earlier views.

Here Kahana obviously chooses to shake off convention as regards the pioneers' ethos and their obsessive commitment to nationally engaged writing. Although at the end of her work she irons out the difficulties, and the tempestuous heroine returns to the bosom of her family and their codes, throughout the novel the author allows herself, just like her heroine, to kick, to rebel, and to cast off her obligations to public opinion, even though she doesn't do so militantly, but mischievously and charmingly. It seems that Kahana is asking for time out, for freedom to fantasize her life as a woman. What could be more refreshing than to imagine, in the problematic reality of the early days of statehood, a fantastic adventure of forbidden love taking place in Lebanese luxury hotels, between a Viennese Jewish woman and a Jaffa Arab? Kahana does not express the drama through national conflict, and certainly not through psychological explanations of a separation trauma, or through the birth of an illegitimate child. On the contrary, the story is about the joys of lovers and childbirth. Gina, an independent woman full of initiatives, like the heroines in the other novels, manipulates a daring, controlled, "feminine" campaign to attain her ends.⁶³

CONCLUSION

In his essay "Men's Feminist Literature," Ben Ezer claims that "the uniqueness of women's literature in Israel is that it has almost no uniqueness. Woman's fears, as well as her domination, or her misery, have been described just as well by male writers."⁶⁴ And Rochelle Furstenberg writes:

Although Hebrew literature can boast many fine women novelists and short-story writers from Devorah Baron to Amalia Kahana-Carmon, there have, until the last decade, been far fewer women than men writing fiction. Certainly, women have attempted to create ideological and philosophical structures upon which Modern Hebrew literature has been predicated. However, when women have written novels and short stories it is rare that they speak in the first person plural. That is, they have written out of personal experience without the selfconscious attempt to represent the collective experience. Their work has been perceived as beautiful, perhaps interesting, but in a minor key.⁶⁵

In a similar vein, it has been claimed that "Israeli women write to 'express

themselves," while novelists, like Amos Oz, seek to be "witchdoctors of society . . . to exorcise the collective ills."

It seems to me that my analysis questions these opinions, which have nourished Israeli public opinion and have become a misleading conception in the study of women's literature in Israel. Despite the expunging of women's texts from the annals of Israeli literature,⁶⁶ a critical, engaged women's literature has managed to break through, however sporadically. Its proponents are women writers, who not only want to express themselves, but want to leave their mark on the national Zionist enterprise. Elsewhere, I described the situation of Israeli women writers in the 1980s and 1990s, who attempted to free themselves of dictated, accepted norms, as well as grope for literary alternatives.⁶⁷ It must now be added that, from a historical perspective, both attempts belong to one development, for the critical texts, the women's "public emissary" texts, even if marginal and unaccepted, continue to monitor events in order to point out the tribe's "collective ills."

E. Ben Ezer concludes his essay with an "open question": "Why hasn't some uniquely Israeli women's cry burst out of a Hebrew woman writer?" This study seems to disqualify the question. Israeli women's protest literature, which first dealt with the absence of woman in the formation of the Yishuv, later turned to woman's existential feeling of lack of home at home, and against male national dogmatism. Israeli women's literature has been pronounced in a different voice, has used different poetics. This, in my opinion, does make women's fiction in Israel unique.

46. See Spivak, "Three Women's Texts"; See also George's analysis of the writings by Englishwomen in India, in George, *Politics of Home*, 36-42. George argues that it was precisely as colonizers—that is, when defined against a racial (and class) native Other, on the one hand, and as valued contributors to the "housekeeping" of the empire, on the other—that these women achieved authoritative selfhood (even before their sisters in England, who at same time were fighting for the right to vote).

47. Spivak "Three Women's Texts," 186-87.

CHAPTER 7

I wish to express my gratitude to Riva Rubin for her assistance in translating this article from the Hebrew.

1. "Introduction," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker, Doris Sommer, and Patricia Yaeger (New York, 1994), 6.

2. Yaffah Berlovitz, *Inventing a Land, Inventing a People* (Tel Aviv, 1996), 15-46 (Hebrew).

3. Yaffah Berlovitz, "The Woman in Women's Literature of the First Wave of Immigration," *Cathedra* 54 (1989): 107-12 (Hebrew).

4. Deborah Bernstein, *A Woman in Eretz Israel: The Struggle for Equality, Women Workers in the Palestine "Yishuv"* (Tel Aviv, 1987) (Hebrew).

5. Shmuel Feiner, "The Modern Jewish Woman: A Test Case in the Relationship between *Haskalah* and Modernity," *Zion* 58 (1993): 470-97 (Hebrew).

6. The Hebrew word *bayit* means both "house" and "home" (in the sense of family). In biblical Hebrew the word is used to signify the woman and the fruit of her womb, as in "every man and his household came" (Exodus 1: 1). For "home" as signifying woman in Jewish sources, see J. Nacht, *The Symbolism of the Woman: A Study in Folklore* (Tel Aviv, 1959), 54-61 (Hebrew).

7. Nurith Govrin, *Honey from the Rock* (Tel Aviv, 1989), 144-45 (Hebrew).

8. Shin Shifra, "The (Female) Writer as (Female) Witness," *Ma'ariv*, April 17, 1987 (Hebrew).

9. Amaliah Kahana-Carmon, "She Writes Quite Nicely, But on Marginal Matters," *Yediot Aharonot*, February 5, 1988 (Hebrew).

10. Shifra, "The (Female) Writer."

11. Berlovitz, *Inventing a Land*, 57-62.

12. Shulamit Aloni, *Women as People* (Tel Aviv, 1976) (Hebrew); Marcia Freedman, *Exile in the Promised Land* (Tel Aviv, 1991).

13. Ruth Almog, *Dangling Roots* (Tel Aviv, 1987), 312, 345 (Hebrew).

14. *Ibid.*, 331.

15. Other stories in which man appears in a military role are "The Mole" (a Mossad agent), "The Sand Street" (an air force pilot), and "Good Girl" (a guard in Mandatory Palestine of the 1920s).

16. Shin Shifra, *The Sand Street* (Tel Aviv, 1994), 183 (Hebrew).

17. S. M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, in their discussion of Snow White, refer to man's framing the woman as his own work of art. Snow White's mother is framed in the square of the window, the stepmother in the mirror, and Snow White, poisoned, in the glass coffin like a statue on display. See *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven, 1979), 43-44.

18. Gilbert and Gubar claim that women writers of the nineteenth century chose to

represent insane and sick women in order to allow themselves and the characters to break out of the normative frame of the restrictive male society. See *Madwoman*, 16-36. Apparently, this applies to women's fiction in Palestine (Pukhachewsky) and Israel (Castel-Bloom), at the beginning and the end of the twentieth century.

19. Orly Castel-Bloom, *Where am I?* (Tel Aviv, 1990), 98-100, 107 (Hebrew).
20. *Ibid.*, 33-35.
21. Orly Castel-Bloom, *Dolly City* (Tel Aviv, 1992), 29, 123 (Hebrew).
22. *Ibid.*, 59. See also Craig Owens, "The Discourse of Others: Feminism and Postmodernism," in *Anti-Aesthetics*, ed. H. Foster (Washington, D.C., 1983), 57-82.
23. Shulamit Lapid, *Local Paper* (Tel Aviv, 1991), 83, 182 (Hebrew). See also Yaffah Berlovitz, "Locale, Local Paper," *Ma'ariv*, September 15, 1993 (Hebrew).
24. Aharon Komem, "The Jewish Hero and the Gentile Young Woman," *Ma'ariv*, December 15, 1993 (Hebrew); *idem*, "The Masculine Model and the Feminine Model," *Ma'ariv*, December 24, 1993 (Hebrew). See also "Introduction," in *The Arab in Israeli Fiction*, ed. Ehud Ben Ezer (Tel Aviv, 1992), 7-55 (Hebrew); Shifra, "To Kill a Woman," *Politica* 27 (July 1989): 23-27 (Hebrew).
25. Komem, "The Masculine Model," 35.
26. Ben Ezer, *Arab in Israeli Fiction*, 36.
27. Shifra, "To Kill a Woman," 24.
28. There are, however, a few examples of the "masculine model" (that is, a love affair between a Jewish man and an Arab woman). One such example is Shoshana Shabo's "Samson in the Vintage Season" (1932), which describes how an Arab woman worker is exploited by her employer, a Jewish farmer.
29. Berlovitz, *Inventing a Land*, 113-66.
30. Gideon Ofrat, *Gardens in the Air* (Jerusalem, 1991), 21 (Hebrew).
31. Batiah Kahana, *The Arrows Are beyond Thee* (Ramat Gan, 1960); Hemdah Alon, *No Trespassing* (Tel Aviv, 1962); Smadar Hartzfeld, *Inta Umri* (Tel Aviv, 1994); Joceline Carmi-Amir, *Threads of Sand* (Tel Aviv, 1994). For other works dealing with Jewish woman/Arab man relations, see Hadarah Lazar, *From Now On* (Tel Aviv, 1983); Corinna, *Pink Pages* (Tel Aviv, 1989); Dorit Zilberman, *My Judge* (Tel Aviv, 1995).
32. Kahana, *Arrows*, 44.
33. Alon, *No Trespassing*, 10.
34. Carmi-Amir, *Threads*, 10.
35. Alon, *No Trespassing*, 50, 146.
36. Carmi-Amir, *Threads*, 127.
37. Alon, *No Trespassing*, 64-66.
38. *Ibid.*, 95-96, 122.
39. Kahana, *Arrows*, 130-31.
40. Hartzfeld, *Inta Umri*, 141. It should be noted that "Inta 'Umri" ("you are my life") is the title of a well-known love poem sung by the famous Egyptian female singer Umm Kulthum.
41. *Ibid.*, 39.
42. Alon, *No Trespassing*, 154.
43. *Ibid.*, 158.
44. *Ibid.*, 55, 129.
45. Hartzfeld, *Inta Umri*, 74.
46. *Ibid.*, 145.
47. Carmi-Amir, *Threads*, 40.

48. Franz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth, 1967), 199.
49. Julia Kristeva, "Women's Time," in *The Kristeva Reader*, ed. T. Moi (London 1986), 209.
50. Homi K. Bhabha, "Introduction: Narrating the Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Homi K. Bhabha (London, 1994), 4.
51. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex* (New York, 1952), xvi, xvii.
52. See for these phrases Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York, 1990), 6-7.
53. Here is what Bhabha writes about feelings of loss (among oppressed minorities) that find expression in language and speech: "The object of loss [the National Home] is written across the bodies of the people, as it repeats in the silence that speaks the foreignness of language." Homi K. Bhabha, "Dissemination: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, 315.
54. Alon, *No Trespassing*, 178, 180, 181.
55. Hartzfeld, *Inta Umri*, 42-43.
56. *Ibid.*, 8.
57. *Ibid.*, 49-50.
58. Alon, *No Trespassing*, 68, 78, 176, 208.
59. *Ibid.*, 284, 287-89.
60. Carmi-Amir, *Threads*, 201-202.
61. *Ibid.*, 203.
62. Kahana, *Arrows*, 17.
63. Yaffah Berlovitz, "The Freedom to Fantasize Life," *Ma'ariv*, April 20, 1995 (Hebrew).
64. Ehud Ben Ezer, "Men's 'Feminine' Literature," *Na'amat* (June-July 1985): 65 (Hebrew).
65. Rochelle Furstenberg, "Dreaming of Flying," *Modern Hebrew Literature* 6 (1991): 5.
66. Lily Rattok, "Every Woman Knows It," in *The Other Voice: Women's Fiction in Hebrew*, ed. Lily Rattok (Tel Aviv, 1994), 261-74 (Hebrew).
67. Yaffah Berlovitz, "Feminization of Israeli Literature—Indeed? Comments on the Rising Phenomenon of Contemporary Women's Literature," *Moznaim* 9 (August 1992): 45-48 (Hebrew).

CHAPTER 8

1. *Keys to the Garden: New Israeli Writing*, ed. Ammiel Alcalay (San Francisco, 1996), xi.
2. *Ibid.*, 190. Albert Swissa, born in Casablanca, Morocco in 1959, emigrated to Israel in 1963 and published in 1990 the novel *Aqud* ("The Bound").
3. Ella Shohat, "The Representation of Woman and East in Israeli Cinema," *Israeli Society: Critical Aspects*, ed. Uri Ram (Tel Aviv, 1993), 243 (Hebrew).
4. Amnon Raz-Krakotzkin, "Within Sovereignty: Toward a Critique of the 'Negation of Exile' in Israeli Culture," *Theory and Criticism* 5 (1994): 126 (Hebrew).
5. Pninah Mozafi-Haller, "'You Have an Authentic Voice': Anthropology and the Politics of Representation," *Theory and Criticism* 11 (1997): 86 (Hebrew).
6. Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London, 1994), 9.
7. Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera* (San Francisco, 1987).